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PALMER'S MAP OF THE SOUTH SHETLANDS AND THE PALMER PENINSULA

by William Herbert Hobbs

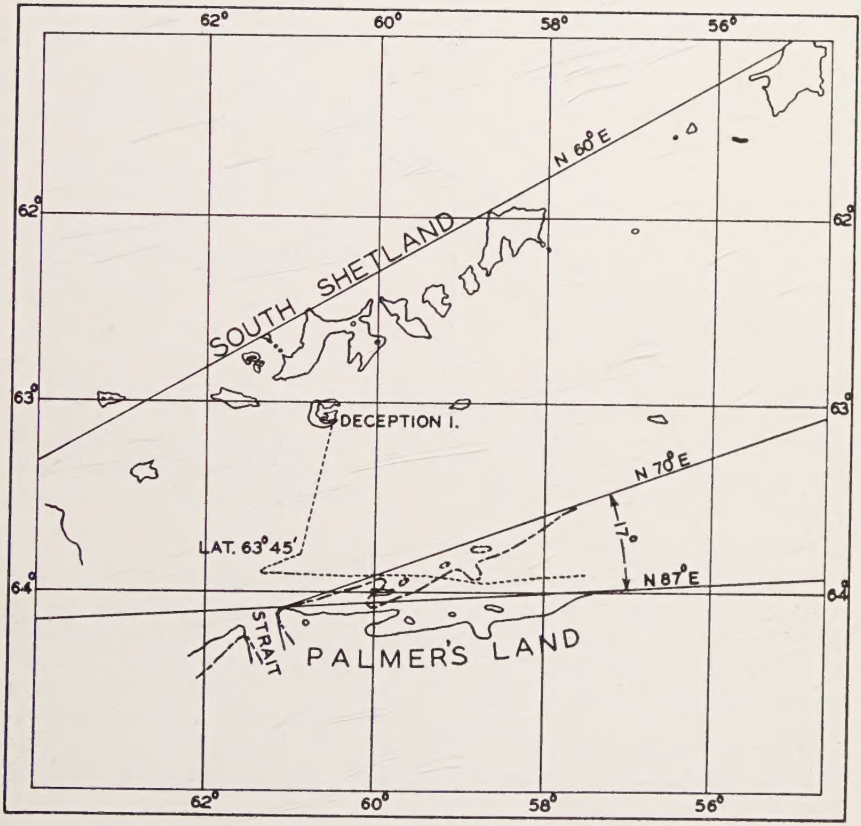

Fig. 1. Palmer's map of the South Shetlands and Palmer's Land (Palmer Peninsula) surveyed in 1820. Compare with Fig. 3 on which the isogons of compass variation have been entered on a modern map (H. O. chart 1706).

Nathaniel Brown Palmer of Stonington, Connecticut, the discoverer of the Antarctic Continent, made the first chart of the South Shetland Islands and of the northern coast of the Palmer Peninsula. This was in 1820, when he was barely twenty-one years of age, but in command of the little *Hero,* a sloop of only 45 tons burden, the exploring and survey vessel of a squadron of five sealing ships, all from Stonington, operating in the South Shetlands. Copies of his map were given to a British and to a Russian explorer, and these copies were published abroad as theirs, so that it was long thought by many that they were the discoverers.[1]

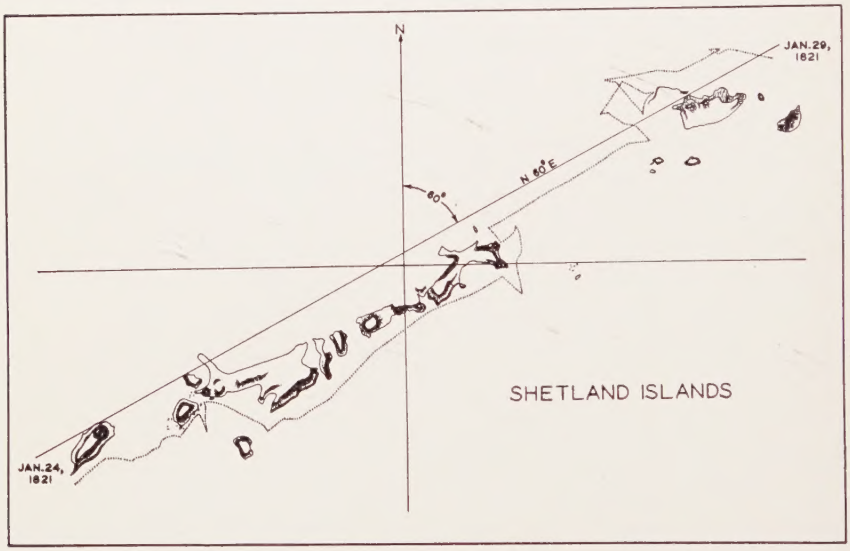

Fig. 2. Map of the Shetland Islands after Bellingshausen but with place names omitted. Comparison with Fig. 1 shows that it is Palmer's map with the coasts he (Bellingshausen) had seen strengthened by him with heavier lines.

Palmer's map of the South Shetlands was remarkable for its detail and for its accuracy, and it was for nearly a century the standard map of the islands on which all later ones were based. The map of the northern coast of Palmer's Land was, somewhat by contrast, while good as to outline, in an orientation rotated about 17° clockwise from its true position. (See Figs. 1 and 3.) For a mapmaker so competent as Palmer, this was quite incomprehensible. The explanation has now been found in the fact that with a single latitude observation the coast had to be charted by compass uncorrected for variation.

[1]The very full history has been published by this writer under the title: The discoveries of Antarctica in the American sector, as revealed by maps and documents. Trans. Amer. Philos. Society, N. S., vol. XXXI, pt. 1, pp. 16-39, pls. III-XV, January, 1939.

The islands of the South Shetland group were charted by the aid of both latitude and longitude observations, and the trend of the chain is accurate, N 60° E. For the shore of Palmer's Land, Palmer took a single latitude observation, 63° 45′, off the mouth of a "strait" (See Fig. 1) and in quite the correct position. The shore he mapped by compass-bearing as he skirted it, and he had no way to learn the variation of his compass for the area. It is only within the last few years that the reliable compass corrections for the seas of the world have become generally available through the publication of a chart by the U. S. Navy Department. (See Fig. 3.)[2]

There is an annual change of these values amounting to a few minutes only of arc, but inasmuch as the magnetic Poles appear to have an orbital movement of small radius and of short cyclic period, the changes are apparently not in any large measure cumulative. The isogons of compass variation for 1945 have been entered on the map of figure 3, where it may be seen that the average eastward variation for the stretch of coast mapped by Palmer is about 17°, the angle by which Palmer's map of the coast differs from its true position. A contraclockwise rotation of the coast through this angle brings it into correspondence with the coast on the modern map, N 70° E. (See Figs. 1, 2 and 3.)

As regards the crediting of the Palmer chart to George Powell, a young British sealer who had made jointly with Palmer and in entire amity a discovery of the South Orkney Islands far to the east; Powell had requested a copy of the Palmer map to publish in England, and this was granted, of course on the assumption that credit would be given to Palmer. Powell left the map in the hands of a friend, Mr. Lewthwaite of Prince's Street. Powell sailed for the Tonga Islands and was killed there by natives. His friend turned the Palmer map over to Laurie, the Admiralty chartmaker, and it was published as "from the exploration of the sloop *Dove* in the years 1821 and 1822 by George Powell, Commander of the same". This map after distribution by the Admiralty was withdrawn and subsequent editions (issued by the Admiralty) credited, not to Powell, but to Bransfield, a British royal navy officer.

The other false attribution, this time by the Russian Admiral Bellingshausen, has been cleared up by the recent recovery of a letter by Palmer dated in 1876 and addressed to United States Consul General Frank T. Bush at Hong Kong. An extract from this letter, now in the safe at the Library of Congress, is with explanatory statements between brackets as follows[3]:

> My first command [deep-sea command. He had commanded coasting vessels since he was eighteen] was the ship "Hero" in 1820. It was on this voyage that Palmer's Land was discovered, and subsequently we [Palmer and his crew] fell in with the Russian Squadron under Admiral Krustenten (Krustentein) [Palmer's contact had been made through a Russian interpreter. Palmer gave an interview on his return

[2]H. O. Chart 1706, The Variation of the Compass for the year 1945, Washington, 1946. First edition.

[3]Lawrence Martin, Library of Congress, Antarctica discovered by a Connecticut Yankee, Captain Nathaniel Brown Palmer, Geog. Rev., vol. XXX, October, 1940. Facsimile of Palmer letter is on p. 537.

to Stonington and named the Russian Hellershausen. Now, fifty-five years later, he confuses Bellingshausen with Krusenstern, the Russian Admiral who was in Antarctic seas nineteen years earlier] consisting of Frigate Rostok [should be *Vostok*] and a sloop of the name I have forgotten [*Mirny*] it was with great difficulty that I could make the Admiral believe I had come from the states in so small a vessel. He treated me with great kindness, for the services I had rendered him in extricating his ship from a dilemma, he found himself [in] when the fog lit up surrounded by land and other obstacles [Antarctic icebergs] and as we [Palmer and his crew] was the first vessel [*Hero*] that had circumnavigated the Shetland group *and had to make our own charts* [my Italics] from which he [Bellingshausen] *took a copy on tissue paper* (my Italics), as he meant of taking his ship from all the dangers and proceeded on his way to Rio Janeiro. Among other things I informed him of our *Trip to the South in Latt. 68°* [my Italics. In Palmer's report on return to Stonington he withheld this figure. It was along the west coast, the generally open one, to Charcot's later named Marguerite Bay, where he named a mountain, Mount Wilcox, after his First Mate, Phineas Wilcox] and the discovery of a Land (never before seen) and it was him that named it Palmer's Land.

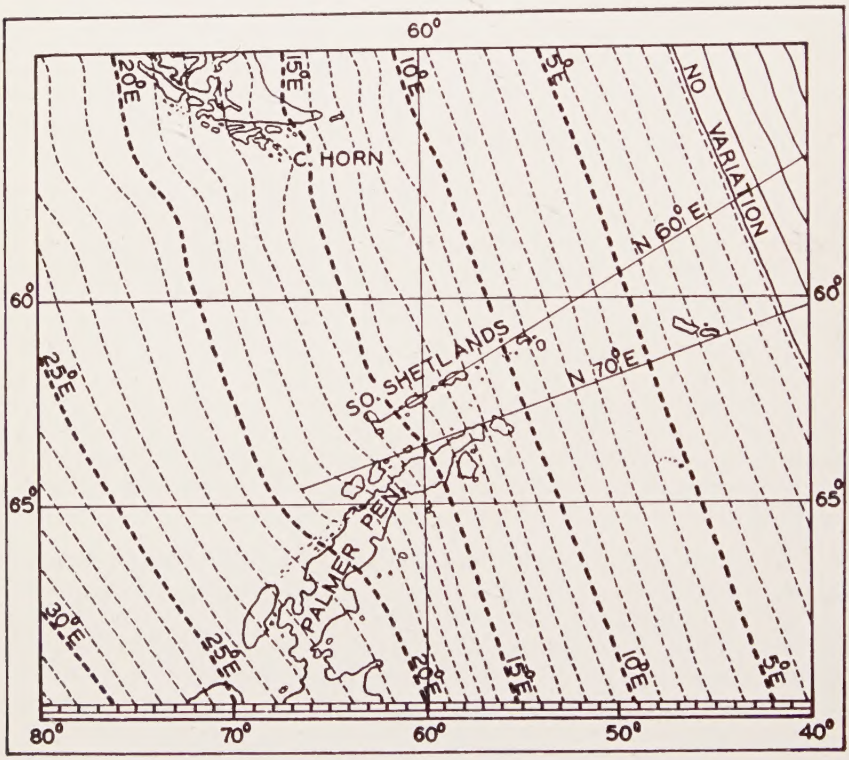

Fig. 3. Map of the South Shetland Islands and the Palmer Peninsula with isogons of compass variation. This is from H. O. Chart 1706 issued by the U. S. Navy Department in 1946.

Examination of Bellingshausen's map, reproduced without his own place names in Figure 2, shows that this is the map of his tissue paper tracing, but with the coasts he had *merely confirmed* in much heavier lines. Comparison

of this map published by Bellingshausen as his own, but copied from the tissue paper tracing he had made from Palmer's map in November, 1820, supplies the complete proof, if such were needed, that the Admiralty map issued November 1st, 1822, (See Hobbs, loc.cit. pls. IX and X) and credited first to Powell and later to Bransfield, is in reality the Palmer map. In his report[4] Bellingshausen told of meeting Palmer, but referred only to their conversation about seals, not a word about Palmer's Land or of the map which Palmer had given him and which he had published as his own.

NEWS OF THE SOCIETY

On Friday, June 23rd, the Society purchased for $75,000 the residence of the late Curtis H. Veeder at 1 Elizabeth Street. This culminated several months of negotiations during which time the property was rezoned to A-2 so that it could be occupied as a public building.

In anticipation of this, the library was closed on June 19 and all the books on our metal shelving were packed, the shelves dismantled, and on Monday, the 26th, we began moving. The same day, The Wadhams and May Co., with our member Robert H. Schutz as architect, commenced alterations.

Working in close conjunction with the contractor and architect, the Special Building Committee, consisting of President Waterman, Vice-Presidents Newton C. Brainard and Charles S. Bissell, and the Director, made plans for installation of our museum and library. This required approval of the Buildings Department, which at all times was most cooperative.

In brief, the plans included demolishing partitions on the second floor to make museum exhibition space. From 6 bedrooms, a hall, and 4 bathrooms, we secured four rooms, 20 x 40, 20 x 28, 24 x 19 and 12 x 16 feet. This required complete rewiring of the second floor. The heating system was changed from coal to oil and modernized with installation of circulating ducts.

The rest of the work, beside refinishing, was, mainly, conforming to building codes such as the swing of outside doors, fire doors and exit lighting.

An addition for the bulk of the library is necessary and plans are being drawn.

When you read this, many of you will already have visited us and made use of the library. However, as these lines are written, we are in the midst of shelving our manuscript collection preparatory to reopening about September 25. There is a great deal to do in moving a collection such as ours and at the same time making alterations necessary for installation of both a library and

[4]The voyage of Captain Bellingshausen to the Antarctic seas, 1819-1821, Edited by Frank Debenham, Director of the Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge (The Hakluyt Society, Second Series, vols XCI and XCII) London: the Society, 1945, pp. xxx, 259, viii, 261-474. (Review in The American Historical Review, vol. LII, Oct. 1947, pp. 106-108).

The preceding was contributed by William Herbert Hobbs, since 1934 Professor Emeritus, University of Michigan. Professor Hobbs is the author of many books and articles on various phases of geology.

museum. So far there have been interminable conferences on problems such as floor and wall covering. A parking lot has also required considerable thought so that you who visit us will have no difficulty in parking your car.

Having been in the building almost two months, we are more convinced than ever before that this new site and building was made to order for us. We found a 27 inch poured concrete wall between two baths, a 15 inch concrete floor in the attic and enough lighting circuits to satisfy our every requirement. The building is always comfortably cool and midst such delightful surroundings, we can not help working a bit harder than usual and we are sure you will feel the same.

Reopening is not so much dependent on us as it is on the delivery of fire doors and installation of the heating system. We already have moved all we can put in the building without the stack addition, but the fire doors are necessary in a public building and we must clean up the concrete and plaster dust caused by drilling for heating ducts and demolition of partitions. Since we can not start mopping and scrubbing until this is completed, we shall probably be cleaning until the doors open.

Moving any time is a chore and to move for the first time in 108 years is even more so, particularly with construction, which governs our timetable. For example nothing from the museum can be brought in until the building is cleaned. Refinishing the museum portion of the building is still several months off. Consequently we can only plan how and what to do when that time comes.

Already in and arranged, are the genealogical collection, both printed and manuscript, our historical manuscripts, catalogued books, and 18th century newspapers.

As soon as possible we plan to move the things from a warehouse and save the storage charges. After a storage rack for our portraits is erected in the attic, we can move our portraits from the Ætna Building vault and then pack and move some 15,000 volumes in storage there with a resulting savings in storage charges.

The question of money has been ever foremost in our minds. We have tried not to let it affect certain decisions where some savings might be effected at the expense of convenience, efficiency or maintenance. However, with limited funds available, we are not doing all we should like, or things that can easily be done later. We are doing primarily those things required of a public building for installation of a library and museum, and also certain repairs. In this group comes the ornamental stone on the balcony, terrace and porte-cochere which must be flashed to stop seepage and costly repairs later.

In view of this it is evident that the gift of certain objects will add much to the enjoyment of the new building and save money needed for other things. We were not given a refrigerator and a multigraph because it never occurred to their owners we might be able to make use of them. To forestall this in the future, from time to time we shall list a few of the things we need. For example: an electric refrigerator, a coffee urn, a coffee service, a typewriter with "Bulletin" or a comparable size type for preparing labels all can read, a duplicator using type, not stencils, and cups and saucers.

Whenever disposing of useful objects, think of us. They may be the solution to one of our many problems.

Anyone interested in donating funds for museum cases is requested to contact the Director. Wall or table cases with self-contained lighting cost about $500 and would make splendid useful memorials. A small metal placque will be attached to each case so there will be a permanent public recognition of such a gift. There is no limit to the number of cases that can be used. It is to be hoped that a number of our members and friends will come to our assistance in this matter.

ABRAHAM PIERSON'S JOURNAL

(Continued from page 24)

At a Town meeting June ye. 29th. the Town Clerk being absent I was Chosen Clerk of Sd. meeting. at the Same meeting I was chosen to Collect a parcel of Beef for the Army & also to Store a Quantity of provition but Refused.

At a town meeting holden immediately after Pron on Septr. ye 11th. I was Chosen to Receive & Store Beef & other articles for the whole town which Should be brought in to a large State tax 2/6 on the pound.

Wednesday Septr. ye. 12th I with my wife & Roxanna Set out on a journey partly for her health & also to visit Relations we arrived at Northampton & Staid & went to meeting there the next Sabbath from there we went to Conway to her Brother Ebr. Redfield we Staid there & went to meeting next Sabbath Monday Septr. 24th. we went from Conway over to Lenox Staid 2 Nights with Mamma Isbel from there to Richmond to See Brother Beriah & went through west Stockbridge & Down as far as Salisbury by the next Sabbath I went to meeting being Stormy they Staid at Capt. Samll. Lanes we got home Thursday about noon October. 5th.

Sunday Novr. 11th. Capt. Ebenezer Barnard of hartford came to my house tarried all night & employed me to purchase a Quantity of Salt for the State left paytable orders in my hands to pay for more than 200 Bushel at 12/ pr. Bushel. I purchased 500 Bushels of Salt for the State.

At a Society meeting Decr. ye. 10th. I was again Chosen Choirister & Society Treasurer was also chosen Clerk to enter the Doings of Sd meeting Capt. Kelcey being absent. I was also Chosen one of the Committee to Seat ye. meeting house but Refused.

At a Town meeting holden by Adjournment Decr. ye. 17th. I was Chosen a Selectman of the town.

December ye. 26: 1781. I began to keep School in meeting house District my wages was £3:0:0 per month at wheat 6/ per Bushel I kept 3 months night School 2 nights in a week my Day School consisted of about 33 but not more than 30 at once, my night School consisted of about 17 tho' not more than 13 at once. I finished Sd. School March 23: 1782.

At a Society meeting Decr. ye. 2d. 1782. I was chosen Society Committee, Society Treasurer & Choirister for the year ensuing.

Monday January ye. 13th. 1783. about 11, O'Clock in the evening my wife was Delivered of a living & perfect female Child, it Seemed to be well, & was uncomon Quiet & Seemed likely to live & Do well till friday evening next when it was taken Sick I Suppose with Convulsion in its bowels it Seemed to be Distressed with pain till Satturday evening & then we Sent for Revd. Mr Henry Ely who came over & Baptized it—Lydia. its pain grew easier & it lay all the latter part of the night in Still convulsion & Sunday morning Jan. 19th about 9, O'Clock it Died being 5 Days & 10 hours old. Monday afternoon it was Decently Intered & a considerable number of people attended Said Child when it was first Dressed weighed Eight Pounds & five ounces.

December ye. 11th. AD. 1782. Began to keep School in meeting House District my wages was £3 per month I kept three months & a fortnight. Night School Two nights in a week: My Day School consisted of about 38 Scholars though not more than 33 at once my Night School consisted of 19 but not more than 15 or 16 at once. I finished Said School March ye. 15th. 1783.

At a Training Day May ye. 5th 1783. I was Chosen Ensign of the Company then under Command of Capt. Bristol by a Majority of 101 against 35—

At a Society Meeting Decr. 8th 1783. I was Chosen Society Committee Society Treasurer & Choirister for ye. year ensuing—

Town Meeting Decr. 9th I was Chosen 2d. Constable but Did not take the oath till adjourned meeting Decr. 17th

February ye. 12-1784. I was an Arbitrator with Capt. Aaron Kelcey & Capt. Bez. Bristol in a quarrel between Daniel & Aaron Clark

Feb. 13th I was again an Arbitrator with John Pierson Esqr. & Lieut. Danll. Parmele in a Quarrel between Sd. Daniel Clark & Levi Hull—

December ye. 15th. 1783. I began to keep School in meeting House District I kept Day School 3 months at £3 per month also kept night School 24 Nights —my Day School consisted of about 39 Scholars tho' not more than 33 at once—my Night School consisted of about 23 tho' not more than 19 at once. I finished Sd. School March ye. 19th. AD. 1784—

May 5th. 1784. I was an arbitrator with Mr Benoni Hillard & Job Wright Esqr. in a Case between Phinehas Pierson & John Carter Junr. First Monday in Octr. 1784—I was Chosen Lieutenant by a majority of 120 to about 6 or 7 votes

Society Meeting Decr. 13th. 1784 I was again Chosen Society Comtee Society Treasurer & Choirister—

Town meeting Decr. 14. I was Chosen first Constable to Collect State Taxes & took the oath—

Janry 27. & 28th. AD. 1785. Esqr. Morgan Capt. Stephen Lane & myself Appraised the Estate of Jedidiah Pierson Deceased we being appointed to Appraise & Distribute Sd. Estate by his Son Jedidiah Executor of his Last Will & Testament—

(To be continued)

The price of these Bulletins is ten cents each.